

Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY PARIS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 3804
INFO ALL EC CAPITALS
USMISSION NATO
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
AMCONSUL BORDEAUX
AMCONSUL LYON
AMCONSUL MARSEILLE
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 PARIS 16878

BRUSSELS FOR USEEC

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, PGOV, PFOR, FR, XG
SUBJECT: JACQUES CHIRAC'S LATEST COUP: THE EC PARLIA-
MENT

SUMMARY. RPR PRESIDENT CHIRAC SURPRISED ALMOST EVERY-
ONE ON JUNE 7 BY CALLING FOR A POSTPONEMENT OF THE
EC PARLIAMENTARY DEBATE IN THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY SCHE-
DULED FOR JUNE 14 AND 15. MOST OBSERVERS HAD FELT THAT
CHIRAC AND THE GOF'S POSITIONS WERE MOVING CLOSER TOGE-
THER OVER THE PAST FEW WEEKS, AFTER THE GOF MADE TWO
IMPORTANT GESTURES IN THE RPR'S DIRECTION: THE ADDITION
TO THE BILL OF AN ARTICLE MAKING ANY UNAGREED EXTENSION
OF ECP COMPETENCES NULL AND VOID IN FRANCE AND PRIME
MINISTER BARRE'S SEPARATE MEETING WITH RPR PARLIAMENTAR-
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IAN'S MAY 31 TO EXPLAIN THE ENTIRE TEXT. THE LEGAL AND
PROCEDURAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RPR DECISIONS ARE COMPLI-
CATED; IT IS THEREFORE DIFFICULT TO PREDICT HOW THE
OPPOSITION PARTIES WILL VOTE. WHAT IS MORE OBVIOUS IS
THAT THE RPR, DESPITE SOME RECENT LULLS AND THE RELATI-
VELY SHORT PERIOD BEFORE LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS (9
MONTHS), CONTINUES TO MARK ITSELF AS A SEPARATE ELEMENT

OF THE MAJORITY AND HAS ONCE AGAIN PRESENTED THE MAJORITY WITH A DIFFICULT PROBLEM TO RESOLVE. END SUMMARY.

1. THE RPR AS THE CATALYST: THE STAGE HAD PRESUMABLY BEEN SET FOR A BETTER UNDERSTANDING BETWEEN THE RPR AND THE REST OF THE GOF WHEN ON MAY 18 THE COUNCIL OF MINISTERS ADOPTED A TEXT WHICH SPECIFIED (REFERRING TO THE CONSTITUTIONAL COUNCIL'S DECISION OF DECEMBER 30, 1976) THAT ANY MODIFICATION OF THE ECP'S COMPETENCES WHICH HAD NOT BEEN RATIFIED OR APPROVED IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE TREATIES OF PARIS AND ROME, WOULD BE CONSIDERED NULL AND VOID FOR FRANCE. ANOTHER ARTICLE PROVIDED THAT THE VOTING PROCEDURE TO BE FOLLOWED WOULD BE NATIONAL-BASED PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION. THE GOF SUBSEQUENTLY EXPLAINED THAT THE ECP VOTE AND THE PROCEDURAL QUESTION WOULD BE EXAMINED BY THE PARLIAMENT SEPARATELY, THE FORMER ON JUNE 14 AND THE LATTER NEXT FALL. CHIRAC AND OTHER RPR LEADERS' (MICHEL DEBRE EXCEPTED) IMMEDIATE REACTION WAS THAT THE NEW TEXT WAS A STEP IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION. THERE WAS ALSO A GENERAL FEELING, PARTICULARLY AFTER THE PRIME MINISTER'S TV DEBATE WITH MITTERRAND IN MID-MAY, THAT CHIRAC WAS HOLDING HIS FIRE TOWARD GISCARD, BARRE AND THE REST OF THE GOF. IN FACT, CHIRAC'S POSITION ON THE ECP AND HIS TACTICS TOWARD THE GOF WERE NEVER THAT CLEAR. AS MANY AS 50 RPR DEPUTIES WERE STILL RESERVED TOWARD THE BILL, AND THE RPR AS A PARTY NEVER SLOWED DOWN IN PROPOSING WHAT AMOUNTS TO AN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNTER-PROGRAM OF GOVERNMENT.

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2. THE OPPOSITION:

A. WHILE ENJOYING THE SPECTACLE OF RENEWED SQUABBLING WITHIN THE MAJORITY, THE SOCIALISTS AND COMMUNISTS ARE IN AN EQUALLY DIFFICULT POSITION. THE PS, SPEAKING OFFICIALLY THROUGH DEPUTY JEAN-PIERRE COT, CONTINUED TO DECLARE ITSELF AGAINST ANY EXTENSION OF ECP COMPETENCES BUT ADDED THAT SUCH A POSSIBILITY WAS UNLIKELY SINCE THEIR LIMITS ARE ALREADY CLEARLY SPELLED OUT IN INTERNATIONAL AGREEMENTS. COT ADDED THAT THE GOF'S NEW TEXT CONSTITUTED A BASIS FOR DISCUSSION. BASICALLY IN FAVOR OF THE ECP, THE PS COULD GO NO FURTHER FOR TWO REASONS: IT MUST CONSTANTLY LOOK OVER ITS SHOULDER TO SEE IF THE PCF -- AND, INTERNALLY, THE LEFT WING CERES FACTION OF THE PS -- ARE STILL IN LINE; AND AS AN OPPOSITION PARTY, IT COULD NOT GIVE A BLANK CHECK FOR AN UPCOMING PARLIAMENTARY DEBATE. THE PS SUBSEQUENTLY WARNED IT WOULD NOT TOLERATE ANY GOF MANEUVERING FOR DOMESTIC REASONS, A CLEAR REFERENCE TO SPLITTING THE BILLS ON THE ECP AND VOTING PROCEDURE BETWEEN THIS AND NEXT FALL'S

SESSION.

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B. THE PCF HAS BEEN HAVING AN EVEN MORE DIFFICULT
TIME OF HIDING ITS RESERVATIONS TO THE PROPOSED LAW.
HIGHLY CRITICAL OF EARLIER GISCARD STATEMENTS TO OTHER
EUROPEAN LEADERS ON THE FUTURE ROLE OF THE ECP AND
CONSTANTLY ATTACKING WILLY BRANDT FOR HIS REFERENCE TO A
"CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY", THE PCF SUDDENLY EXPLAINED IN
MID-MAY THAT IT MIGHT BE ABLE TO LIVE WITH AN ECP IF
CERTAIN GUARANTEES WERE GIVEN (PARIS 11299 AND 13359
CALLS THIS THE NUANCE BETWEEN "NO, BUT" AND "YES, IF.")
NEVERTHELESS, THIS POSITION IS NOT CONSIDERED HERE AS
THE LAST WORD, AND WE JUDGE THAT THERE IS STILL CONSI-
DERABLE RETICENCE WITHIN THE PCF BOTH ON VOTING THE BILL
AND FOR THE IDEA OF EUROPEAN UNIFICATION. COMMUNIST
LEADERS OFTEN REFER TO THE EVOLUTION OF PRESIDENTIAL
POWERS IN FRANCE AFTER UNIVERSAL SUFFRAGE WAS INTRODU-
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CED IN 1962 AND CONCLUDE THAT THE SAME DANGERS EXIST FOR THE ECP, DESPITE WRITTEN RESERVES, ONCE THE BALL STARTS ROLLING.

3. WHERE DO THEY GO FROM HERE?: THE RPR HAD SUPPOSEDLY HOPED THAT AN ADDITIONAL AMENDMENT WOULD BE ADDED TO THE BILL OBLIGING THE GOF TO REOPEN NEGOTIATIONS WITH ITS EC PARTNERS. FRANCE WOULD THEN HAVE OBTAINED FROM ITS EC PARTNERS THE SAME GUARANTEES ON WHICH THE RPR INSISTED AGAINST EXTENDED ECP POWERS. "SUPPOSEDLY" IS THE KEY WORD, FOR PRESIDENT OF THE ASSEMBLY EDGAR FAURE RULED THAT ARTICLE 128 OF THE ASSEMBLY'S RULES DOES NOT PERMIT AN AMENDMENT TO A TREATY PRESENTED FOR RATIFICATION; NO OBSERVER IS WILLING TO ASSUME THAT THE RPR WAS EITHER NAIVE OR IGNORANT OF ARTICLE 128. THE RPR'S ALTERNATIVES ON JUNE 14 WILL THEREFORE BE: A MOTION TO ADJOURN THE DEBATE (CHIRAC'S ANNOUNCEMENT OF JUNE 7); DEBRE'S "PRELIMINARY QUESTION", ALREADY INTRODUCED, WHICH WOULD SEND THE BILL BACK TO COMMITTEE; OR A VOTE AGAINST THE BILL. THE FIRST ALTERNATIVE IS THE MOST LIKELY; THE NEXT QUESTION BEING HOW THE OTHER PARTIES WILL VOTE. THE NON-RPR MEMBERS OF THE MAJORITY WILL OBVIOUSLY SUPPORT THE GOF, BEING ANYWAY AMONG THE MOST PRO-EC MEMBERS OF THE ASSEMBLY. DEPENDING ON THE CONCESSIONS WHICH MITTERRAND FEELS OBLIGED TO OFFER THE CERES, A PROBLEM WHICH WILL BE THE MAIN SUBJECT OF DEBATE AT THE PS NATIONAL CONGRESS AT NANTES (JUNE 16-18), THE PS COULD GO EITHER WAY. VOTING FOR THE GOF COULD PROVE AS DISTASTEFUL TO THE PS AS VOTING AN ANTI-EC MEASURE. A "POX ON BOTH YOUR HOUSES" ABSTENTION COULD KEEP PEACE WITHIN THE PARTY, AT THE COST OF WEASELING ON AN IMPORTANT ISSUE AND RISKING A SPLIT WITH THE PCF. THE PCF WILL HAVE LESS TROUBLE VOTING AN ANTI-EC MOTION, BUT IT IS NOT ANXIOUS TO BREAK LEFT RANKS WITH THE PS. OF THE MANY PROCEDURAL TRICKS AVAILABLE TO THE GOF, ONE MERITS MENTION: THE GOF MAY EN-

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GAGE ITS RESPONSIBILITY ON A BILL WITHOUT CALLING FOR A VOTE; THE BILL THEN BECOMES LAW IF NO MOTION OF CENSURE IS INTRODUCED AND VOTED WITHIN 24 HOURS (ARTICLE 49 OF THE CONSTITUTION). CHIRAC'S STATEMENT YESTERDAY THAT HE DOES NOT WANT A CRISIS IS INTERPRETED AS MEANING THE RPR WOULD NOT INTRODUCE A CENSURE MOTION ON THIS ISSUE.

4. RPR POLITICAL MOTIVES: ONE MAY BELIEVE OR NOT BELIEVE CHIRAC'S PROFESSED PROFOUND ATTACHMENT TO EUROPEAN CONSTRUCTION AND CONCERN FOR THE SOVEREIGN INDEPENDENCE OF FRANCE, BUT IT IS VERY PROBABLE THAT HE DOES NOT WANT A CRISIS WITH THE GOF AT THIS TIME. WHY THEN DID HE DROP HIS BOMBSHELL UNEXPECTEDLY YESTERDAY?

-- LINES WERE BEGINNING TO BLUR BETWEEN THE RPR AND OTHER MAJORITY PARTIES IN THE LAST FEW WEEKS. THEIR LEADERS (INCLUDING VGE AND BARRE) APPEARED MORE CONCILIATORY TOWARD EACH OTHER AND EVERY OTHER MAJORITY PARTY SEEMED TO HAVE A PRO-CHIRAC FACTION IN IT. TO MAINTAIN HIS INITIATIVE AND MOMENTUM, TO AWAKEN THAT CRUCIAL FRACTION OF THE ELECTORATE WHICH HAS BEEN MOVING TO THE LEFT, CHIRAC HAS TO DO THE SPECTACULAR, HAS TO MAKE NEWS, AND MOST IMPORTANT, HAS TO DISTINGUISH HIMSELF AND THE RPR FROM THE REST OF THE MAJORITY.

-- THE RPR MAY HAVE SENSED A SPLIT WITHIN ITS OWN RANKS: WHILE DEBRE MAY HAVE BEEN SPEAKING FOR ONLY ABOUT 20 RPR DEPUTIES, HIS PRESTIGE IN THE PARTY AND NATIONWIDE GOES BEYOND THE VOTES HE CAN MUSTER. AS THE MAJORITY'S LOCOMOTIVE, THE RPR CAN HARDLY AFFORD A SPLIT IN ITS RANKS NOW, HOWEVER SLIGHT. CHIRAC KNOWS

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THIS IS WHAT HIS ADVERSARIES ARE WAITING FOR; HE THUS CHOSE THE LOWER, COMMON DENOMINATOR OF A MOTION ADJOURNING THE DEBATE. (NOTE: EMBOFFS HAVE HEARD RUMORS THAT DEBRE AND HIS ADHERENTS THREATENED TO QUIT THE RPR IF THE BILL WERE PASSED WITH OFFICIAL RPR SUPPORT.

-- SENTIMENT SHOULD NOT BE UNDERESTIMATED ON THIS ISSUE. THE ECP, WHILE NOT A HIGH PRIORITY ISSUE WITH THE PUBLIC, HAS IMPORTANT HISTORICAL AND SENTIMENTAL REFERENCES FOR GAULLISTS. NATIONAL SOVEREIGNTY AND INDEPENDENCE, WHILE NOT THE BURNING CONCERN OF THE 1960'S, IS STILL A VOTE-GETTER IN FRANCE. THE RPR IS NOT ABOUT TO LET THE PCF, ITS ONLY OTHER COMPETITOR, GRAB A MONOPOLY ON THIS ISSUE.

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5. CONCLUSION: WE DO NOT EXPECT THIS INCIDENT TO BALLOON INTO A MAJOR GOVERNMENTAL CRISIS PROVOKING EARLY ELECTIONS. CHIRAC CANNOT AFFORD THE ONUS OF HAVING BROUGHT DOWN THE GOF, AND HIS PARTY CAN PROBABLY USE THE TIME BETWEEN NOW AND NEXT MARCH TO ORGANIZE AND PREPARE ITSELF. IT IS THEREFORE HIGHLY POSSIBLE, SHOULD THE ECP ISSUE COME TO A VOTE, CHIRAC WILL DISENGAGE THE RPR FORMALLY FROM THE VOTE, TELLING RPR DEPUTIES THEY MAY VOTE AS THEY SEE FIT.

6. BY TAKING HIS UNEXPECTED MOVE OF JUNE 7, CHIRAC HAS CERTAINLY REKINDLED ALL THE RIVALRIES AND TENSIONS BETWEEN HIMSELF AND GISCARD/BARRE THAT SOME OBSERVERS HAD HOPED WERE CONTROLLED. CHIRAC HAS NOW PUT THE RPR AND THE GOF IN A CONFRONTATION SITUATION, FROM WHICH NEITHER CAN BACK DOWN WITH EASE. BOTH GISCARD AND BARRE HAVE SAID THEY HAVE NO INTENTION OF CHANGING THE TEXT OF THE BILL OR THE GOF'S CLEARLY STATED POSITION. ENGAGING THE GOVERNMENT'S ARTICLE 49 RESPONSIBILITY WOULD SEEM A LOGICAL, FACE-SAVING WAY OUT OF THIS PRECIPITATION. BUT THE MOTION TO PUT OFF DEBATE WILL COME FIRST, AND ONE CANNOT EXCLUDE THE POSSIBILITY OF OPPOSITION DEPUTIES GOING FOR THE OPPORTUNITY TO STIR IN TROUBLED WATERS. THE COMPLEXITIES OF THE PARLIAMENTARY PROCEDURES GIVE RISE TO TOO MANY ALTERNATIVE COURSES OF ACTION IN NEXT WEEK'S DEBATE TO BE ABLE TO DO MORE THAN OUTLINE THE POSSIBILITIES. SUFFICE IT

TO SAY THAT THE MAJORITY LOOKS A BIT BLOODIED AND COULD
LOOK EVEN WORSE AFTER JUNE 14.
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